

Remarks Following a Meeting With the Cochairs of the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling

June 1, 2010

Good morning, everybody. I just met with these two gentlemen, former Senator Bob Graham of Florida and former EPA Administrator Bill Reilly. They will lead the national commission on the BP oil spill in the Gulf, which is now the greatest environmental disaster of its kind in our history. Their job, along with the other members of the Commission, will be to thoroughly examine the spill and its causes so that we never face such a catastrophe again.

At the same time, we're continuing our efforts on all fronts to contain the damage from this disaster and extend to the people of the Gulf the help they need to confront this ordeal. We've already mounted the largest cleanup effort in the Nation's history and continue to monitor, minute to minute, the efforts to halt or capture the flow of oil from the wrecked BP well. Until the well is stopped, we'll multiply our efforts to meet the growing threat and to address the widespread and unbelievably painful losses experienced by the people along the Gulf Coast. What's being threatened, what's being lost isn't just the source of income, but a way of life, not just fishable waters, but a national treasure.

There are now more than 20,000 men and women in the region working around the clock to contain and clean up the oil. We've authorized more than 17,000 National Guard members to respond across 4 States. More than 1,700 vessels are currently aiding in the response. And we'll ensure that any and all responsible means of containing this leak are pursued as we await the completion of the two relief wells. I've also directed Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and Admiral Thad Allen, who is the national incident commander, to triple the manpower in those places where oil has hit shore or is within 24 hours of impact.

The economic response continues as well. We've ordered BP to pay economic injury claims, and we will make sure they deliver. The Small Business Administration has stepped in to help businesses by approving loans and allowing deferrals of existing loan payments. We've stationed doctors and scientists across the region to look out for people's health and monitor any ill effects felt by cleanup workers and residents. And we will absolutely continue to hold BP and any other responsible parties accountable for financial losses borne by the people in the region.

But our responsibility doesn't end there. We have an obligation to investigate what went wrong and to determine what reforms are needed so that we never have to experience a crisis like this again. If the laws on our books are insufficient to prevent such a spill, the laws must change. If oversight was inadequate to enforce these laws, oversight has to be reformed. If our laws were broken, leading to this death and destruction, my solemn pledge is that we will bring those responsible to justice on behalf of the victims of this catastrophe and the people of the Gulf region.

Now, when Interior Secretary Ken Salazar took office, for example, he found a Minerals and Management Services agency that had been plagued by corruption for years, corruption that was underscored by a recent Inspector General's report that uncovered appalling activity that took place before last year. Secretary Salazar immediately took steps to clean up that corruption. But this oil spill has made clear that more reforms are needed. For years, there's

been a far too cozy relationship between oil companies and the agencies that regulate them. That's why we've decided to separate the people who permit offshore leases, who collect revenues, and who regulate the safety of drilling.

In addition, we've placed a 6-month moratorium on drilling new deepwater oil and gas wells in the Outer Continental Shelf. And now that a 30-day safety and environmental review is complete, we're making a series of changes. The review recommended aggressive new operating standards and requirements for offshore energy companies, which we will put in place. And I've also called on Congress to pass a bill to provide critical resources to respond to this spill and better prepare us for any spills in the future.

Now, all that has to do with dealing with the crisis at hand, but it's critical that we take a comprehensive look at how the oil and gas industry operates and how our Government oversees those operations. That's why I signed an Executive order establishing this national Commission. And I'm extraordinarily pleased that Bob Graham and Bill Reilly have agreed to be its Cochairs.

Bob served two terms as Florida's Governor, represented Florida in the Senate for almost two decades. And during that time, he earned a reputation as a champion of the environment, leading the most extensive environmental protection effort in the State's history. Bill is chairman emeritus of the board of the World Wildlife Fund and is also deeply knowledgeable of the oil and gas industry. He also was EPA Administrator during the first Bush administration, serving during the Exxon *Valdez* disaster.

So I can't think of two people who will bring greater experience or judgment to this task. I personally want to thank both of them for taking on this arduous assignment, for demonstrating a great sense of duty to this country.

Very soon I'll appoint five other distinguished Americans, including leaders in science and engineering, to join them. And they'll work alongside other ongoing reviews, including an independent examination by the National Academy of Engineers. And I've authorized the Commission to hold public hearings and to request information from Government, from non-for-profit organizations, and from experts in the oil and gas industry both at home and abroad, as well as from relevant companies, including BP, Transocean, Halliburton, and others.

I just said in our meeting, in doing this work, they have my full support to follow the facts wherever they may lead, without fear or favor. And I'm directing them to report back in 6 months with options for how we can prevent and mitigate the impact of any future spills that result from offshore drilling.

Now, as a result of this disaster, lives have been lost, businesses have been decimated, communities that had already known great hardship now face the specter of sudden and painful economic dislocations, untold damage is being done to the environment, damage that could last for decades. We owe all those who've been harmed, as well as future generations, a full and vigorous accounting of the events that led to what has now become the worst oil spill in U.S. history. Only then can we be assured that deepwater drilling can take place safely. Only then can we accept further development of these resources as we transition to a clean energy economy. Only then can we be confident that we've done what's necessary to prevent history from repeating itself.

All right. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:50 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Adm. Thad W. Allen, USCG, in his capacity as national incident commander for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

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